2014 Georgia Middle and High School
Safe and Supportive School Environment Data Summary

Background

Nearly 900,000 children were enrolled in public middle and high schools in Georgia during the spring of 2014.[1] A majority of these students spend a large percentage of their time in the school setting – typically 6-7 hours a day for approximately 180 days per year. An integrated school and community approach can improve adolescent health and well-being. [2-4] Academic success may be increased when communities, schools, families, and students work together to meet the needs of students and provide safe and supportive learning environments. [5-6]

Data Description

The School Health Profiles (SHP) is a biennial survey of principals and lead health educators (LHEs) in middle and high schools. SHP monitors the status of school health education, physical education, and school health policies related to HIV/AIDS, tobacco use prevention, nutrition, asthma management activities, and family and community involvement in school health.

For the 2014 SHP survey in Georgia, questionnaires were sent to 392 regular public schools, charter schools, and alternative schools containing any of grades 6 through 12 during spring 2014. Survey questionnaires were received from principals in 77 percent of schools and from LHEs in 72 percent of schools. Because the response rate was greater than 70 percent, the results were weighted and are considered representative of all public schools in Georgia, including traditional, charter and alternative schools containing at least one of the grades 6 through 12.

Overview of Safe and Supportive School Environment Policies and Practices

SHP survey data showed that among Georgia's middle and high schools in 2014:
- Eighty-two percent (82%) have implemented at least three school connectedness strategies.
- Sixty-six percent (66%) have clubs that give students opportunities to learn about people different from them, such as students with disabilities, homeless youth or people from different cultures.
- Fifty-five percent (55%) offered parents and families health information designed to increase knowledge of preventing student bullying and sexual harassment.
- Half (50%) have implemented at least four parent engagement strategies.
- Thirty-eight percent (38%) have policies to prevent bullying and sexual harassment among all students, including electronic aggression.
- Three percent (3%) have implemented HIV, other STD and pregnancy prevention strategies that meet the needs of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning (LGBTQ) youth.
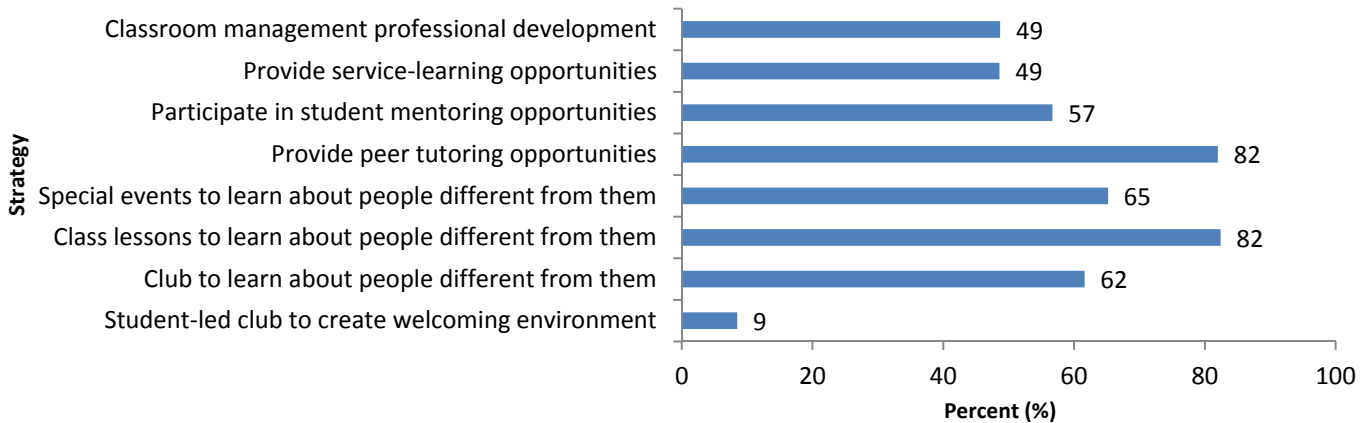
Georgia Middle Schools

School Connectedness

- Most middle schools (78%) have implemented at least three school connectedness strategies (Appendix 1).
- A majority of middle schools (82%) provided peer tutoring opportunities for students (Appendix 1).
- Nine percent (9%) of middle schools have a student-led club that aims to create a safe, welcoming and accepting school environment for all youth, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity (Chart 1).
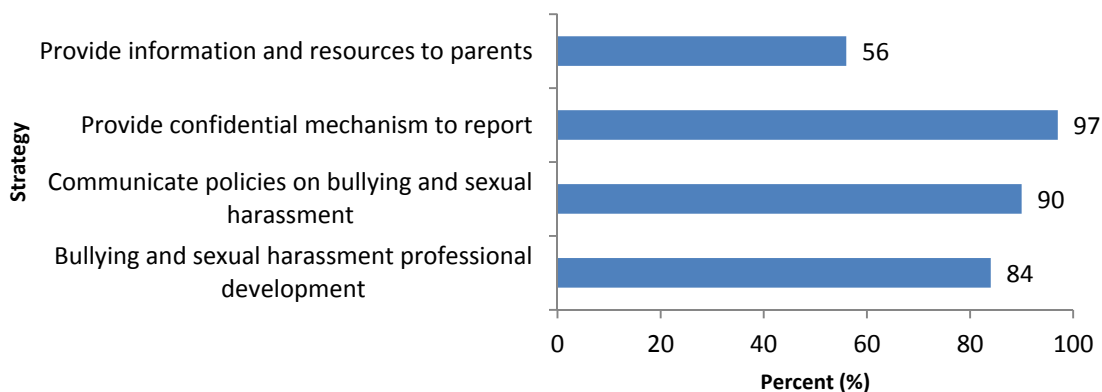
Chart 1. Prevalence of School Connectedness Strategies, Middle Schools, Georgia, 2014

Strategy	Percent (%)
Classroom management professional development	49
Provide service-learning opportunities	49
Participate in student mentoring opportunities	57
Provide peer tutoring opportunities	82
Special events to learn about people different from them	65
Class lessons to learn about people different from them	82
Club to learn about people different from them	62
Student-led club to create welcoming environment	9

Preventing Bullying and Sexual Harassment

- Eighty-four percent (84%) of Georgia middle schools had school staff that had received professional development training on preventing, identifying and responding to bullying and sexual harassment, including electronic aggression (Appendix 1).
- In seventy-nine percent (79%) of middle schools the lead health education teacher would like to receive professional development training on violence prevention (Chart 2).
- In forty-six percent (46%) of middle schools the lead health education teachers received professional development training on violence prevention (e.g. bullying, fighting or dating violence prevention) during the past 2 years (Chart 2).

Chart 2. Prevalence of Bullying and Sexual Harassment Prevention Strategies, Middle Schools, Georgia, 2014
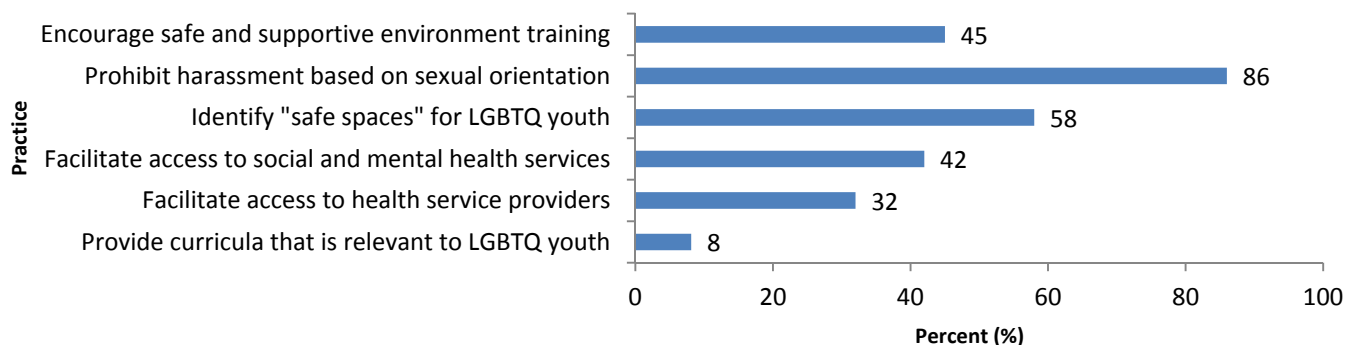
Strategy	Percent (%)
Provide information and resources to parents	56
Provide confidential mechanism to report	97
Communicate policies on bullying and sexual harassment	90
Bullying and sexual harassment professional development	84

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Meeting the Needs of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Questioning Youth

- Only one percent (1%) of Georgia middle schools have implemented all HIV, other STD and pregnancy prevention strategies that meet the needs of LGBTQ youth (Appendix 1).
- Eighty-six percent (86%) of middle schools prohibited harassment based on a student's sexual orientation or gender identity (Chart 3).
- Fifty-eight percent (58%) of middle schools identified "safe spaces" (e.g., a counselor's office, designated classroom or student organization) where LGBTQ youth can receive support from administrators, teachers or other school staff (Chart 3).
- Eight percent (8%) of middle schools provided curricula or supplementary materials that include HIV, STD or pregnancy prevention information relevant to LGBTQ youth (Chart3).

Chart 3. Prevalence of School Practices related to Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Questioning Youth, Middle Schools, Georgia, 2014

Parent Engagement Strategies

- Fifty-one percent (51%) of Georgia middle schools implemented at least four of the parent engagement strategies (Appendix 1).
- Seventy-six percent (76%) of middle schools had at least one means of communicating with parents about school health services and programs (Chart 4).
- Nineteen percent (19%) of middle schools provided information to parents on communicating with their child about sex (Chart 4).

Chart 4. Prevalence of Parent Engagement Strategies, Middle Schools, Georgia, 2014
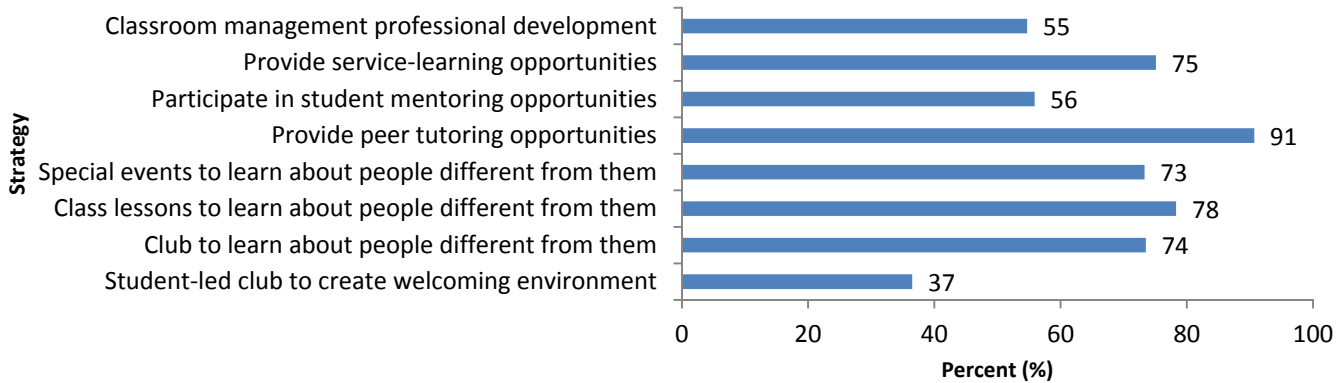

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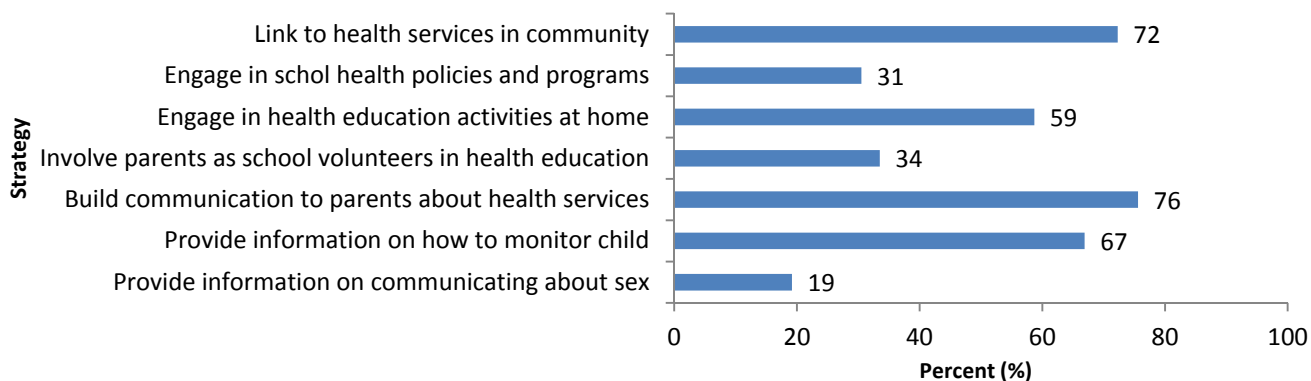
Georgia High Schools

School Connectedness Strategies

- Most high schools (82%) have implemented at least three school connectedness strategies (Appendix 1).
- A majority of high schools (85%) provided peer tutoring opportunities for students.
- Thirty-seven percent (37%) of high schools have a student-led club that aims to create a safe, welcoming and accepting school environment for all youth, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity (Chart 5).
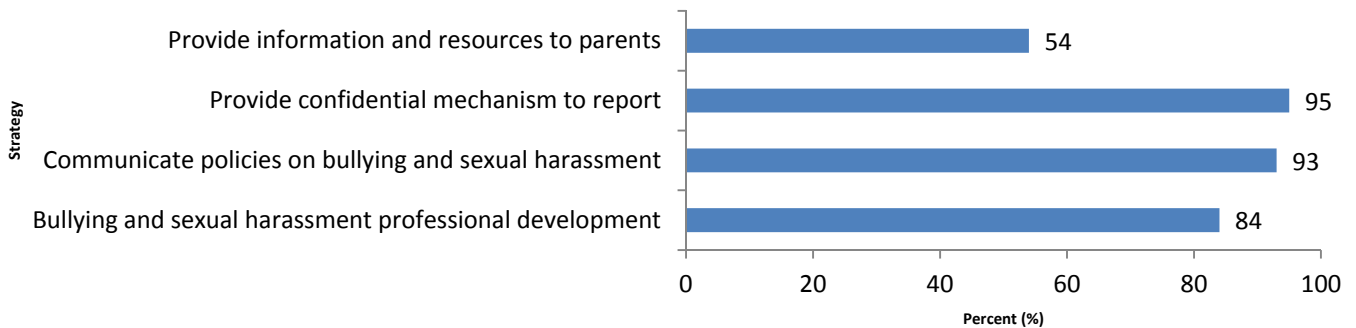
Chart 5. Prevalence of School Connectedness Strategies, High Schools, Georgia, 2014

Strategy	Percent (%)
Classroom management professional development	55
Provide service-learning opportunities	75
Participate in student mentoring opportunities	56
Provide peer tutoring opportunities	91
Special events to learn about people different from them	73
Class lessons to learn about people different from them	78
Club to learn about people different from them	74
Student-led club to create welcoming environment	37

Preventing Bullying and Sexual Harassment

- Eighty-four percent (84%) of Georgia high schools had school staff that had received professional development training on preventing, identifying and responding to bullying and sexual harassment, including electronic aggression (Appendix 1).
- Ninety-five percent (95%) of high schools provided a confidential mechanism for reporting student bullying and sexual harassment to a designated school staff member (Chart 6).
- More than half of high schools provided parents and families with health information to increase knowledge of student bullying and sexual harassment (Chart 6).

**Chart 6. Prevalence of Bullying and Sexual Harassment Prevention Strategies, High Schools, Georgia, 2014**

Strategy	Percent (%)
Provide information and resources to parents	54
Provide confidential mechanism to report	95
Communicate policies on bullying and sexual harassment	93
Bullying and sexual harassment professional development	84

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Meeting the Needs of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Questioning Youth

- Only five percent (5%) of high schools have implemented all HIV, other STD and pregnancy prevention strategies that meet the needs of LGBTQ youth (Appendix 1).
- Ninety-three percent (93%) of high schools prohibited harassment based on a student's sexual orientation or gender identity (Chart 7).
- Sixty-four percent (64%) of high schools identified "safe spaces" (e.g., a counselor's office, designated classroom or student organization) where LGBTQ youth can receive support from administrators, teachers or other school staff (Chart 7).
- Twenty-one percent (21%) of high schools provided curricula or supplementary materials that include HIV, STD or pregnancy prevention information relevant to LGBTQ youth (Chart7).

Chart 7. Prevalence of School Practices related to Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Questioning Youth, High Schools, Georgia, 2014
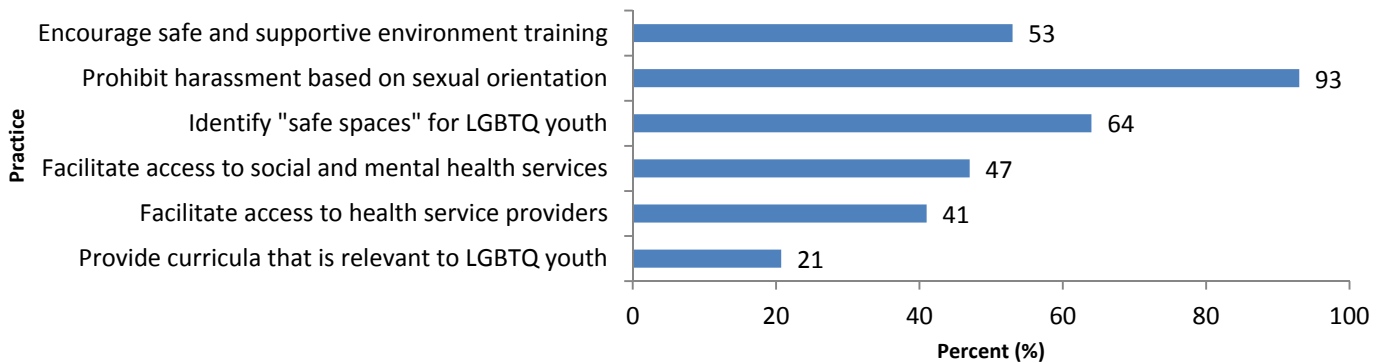
Parent Engagement Strategies

- Seventy-four percent (74%) of high schools had at least one means of communicating with parents about school health services and programs (Chart 8).
- Twenty-seven percent (27%) of high schools provided information to parents on communicating with their child about sex (Chart 8).

Chart 8. Prevalence of Parent Engagement Strategies, High Schools, Georgia, 2014

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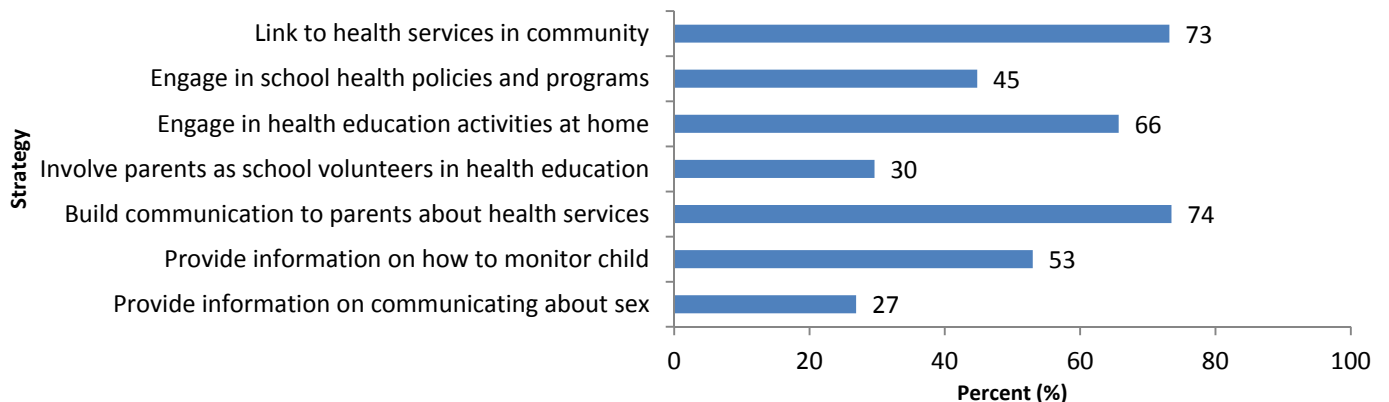
How Can Schools Improve Safe and Supportive School Environments?

By increasing school connectedness: School connectedness is a protective factor for decreasing substance use, school absenteeism, early sexual initiation, violence, and risk of unintentional injury (e.g., drinking and driving, not wearing seat belts).[7] Additionally, being part of a stable peer network protects students from being victimized or bullied.[8] Connectedness is enhanced by a healthy and safe school environment and a supportive psychosocial climate.[9] In the school setting, students feel supported and cared for when they see school staff dedicating their time, interest, attention, and emotional support to them.[10]

By preventing bullying and sexual harassment: Responding quickly and consistently to bullying and sexual harassment can help prevent this behavior over time.[11] Professional development training is needed to help school staff respond appropriately to bullying and sexual harassment.[12] Although evaluation of school-based bullying prevention remains limited, promising practices have been identified, such as having a school-wide anti-bullying policy and enforcing it consistently and promoting cooperation between school teachers, administrators and parents.[13]

By engaging parents or caretakers: Parent engagement in schools is defined as parents and school staff working together to support and improve the learning, development and health of students.[14-15] Students whose parents use effective monitoring practices are less likely to make poor decisions, such as having sex at an early age, smoking cigarettes, drinking alcohol, being physically aggressive, or skipping school.[16] Involving parent members as school volunteers can enrich health and physical education classes, improves the delivery of health services, and help create safe and healthy environments for students.[17] This relationship between schools and parents cuts across and reinforces students' health and learning in the multiple settings-at home, in school, in out-of-school programs, and in the community.[18]

By meeting the needs of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning youth: Safe and supportive school environments are associated with improved education and health outcomes, including sexual health outcomes for all students, and are especially important for students at disproportionate risk of HIV and other STDs (e.g., LGBTQ youth).[19-20] Sexual minority youth are more likely than their heterosexual peers to be threatened or injured with a weapon on school property and to skip school because they feel unsafe.[21] Also, sexual minority youth typically have fewer supportive resources to draw upon and experience lower family and school connectedness, and lower peer support than their heterosexual peers.[22] Supportive schools foster pro-social attitudes and positive health behaviors among students by promoting students' sense of connectedness during the school day.[23]

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Appendix 1. Safe and Supportive Environment Measures

Percent of Schools that Met Safe and Supportive Environment School Level Impact Measures (SSE SLIM) and Implemented each SSE SLIM Strategy by School Level, Georgia, 2014	Percent (%)		
	High School	Middle School	All Schools
Parent Engagement (SSE SLIM 1): Percent of Georgia schools that implemented all parent engagement strategies.	**34.6%**	**40.4%**	**37.7%**
• Provided parents and families with information about how to communicate with their child about sex.	26.9%	19.2%	22.5%
• Provided parents with information about how to monitor their child (e.g., setting parental expectations and keeping track of their child).	53.0%	66.9%	60.2%
• Established one or more communication channels with parents about school health services and programs.	73.5%	75.6%	74.1%
• Involved parents as school volunteers in the delivery of health education activities and services.	29.6%	33.5%	31.4%
• Gave students homework assignments or health education activities to do at home with their parents.	65.7%	58.7%	60.8%
• Engaged parents in the development and implementation of school health policies and programs during the past two years.	44.8%	30.5%	36.3%
• Linked parents and families to health services and programs in the community.	73.2%	72.3%	71.8%
School Connectedness (SSE SLIM 2): Percent of Georgia schools that implemented at least 3 school connectedness strategies.	**88.6%**	**78.0%**	**81.5%**
• Participated in a program in which family or community members serve as role models to students or mentor students.	55.9%	56.7%	55.8%
• Students provided with opportunities to be involved in service learning.	75.1%	48.6%	59.6%
• Students provided with opportunities to be involved in peer tutoring.	90.7%	82.0%	85.4%
• Lead health education teacher received professional development on classroom management techniques in the past 2 years. And,	54.7%	48.7%	51.8%
• Provided clubs or activities that give students opportunities to learn about people different from them such as students with disabilities, homeless youth, or people from different cultures, or	73.5%	61.6%	65.8%
• Offered lessons in class to learn about people different from them*, or	78.3%	82.4%	79.9%
• Offered special events sponsored by the school or community organizations to learn about people different from them*, or	73.3%	65.2%	68.6%
• Providing a student-led club that aims to create a safe, welcoming, and accepting school environment for all youth, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity (sometimes called gay/straight alliances).	36.5%	8.5%	20.9%
Preventing Bulling and Sexual Harassment (SSE SLIM 3): Percent of Georgia schools that implemented all strategies to prevent bullying and sexual harassment, including electronic aggression, among all students.	**34.6%**	**40.4%**	**37.7%**
• Provided professional development for all school staff on student bullying and sexual harassment˜*.	84.0%	83.9%	84.2%
• Publicized and disseminating policies on bullying and sexual harassment via electronic, paper, or oral channels.	92.6%	90.1.%	91.1%
• Provided a confidential mechanism for reporting student bullying and sexual harassment to a designated school staff member.	95.2%	96.7%	96.1%
• Provided parents and families with health information to increase knowledge of student bullying and sexual harassment˜.	53.9%	55.6%	54.7%
Meeting Needs of LGBTQ Youth (SSE SLIM 4): Percent of Georgia schools that implemented all strategies to prevent HIV, other STD, and pregnancy strategies that meet the needs of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning youth.	**4.8%**	**1.2%**	**2.7%**
• Provided curricula or supplementary materials that include HIV, STD, or pregnancy prevention information relevant to LGBTQ youth (e.g., curricula or materials that use inclusive language or terminology).	20.7%	8.1%	13.4%
• Identified "safe spaces" where LGBTQ youth can receive support from administrators, teachers, or other school staff.	64.3%	58.0%	60.9%
• Prohibited harassment based on a student's perceived or actual sexual orientation or gender identity.	93.4%	86.3%	89.3%
• Facilitated access to providers not on school property experienced in providing health services to LGBTQ youth.	41.2%	32.1%	36.7%
• Facilitated access to providers not on school property experienced in providing social and psychological services to LGBTQ youth.	46.6%	41.5%	43.8%
• Encouraged staff to attend professional development on safe and supportive school environments for all students, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity.	53.3%	44.7%	48.5%

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